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Testimony before the Legislative and Nominations Committee

Tuesday, February 1, 2011

12:00 PM in Room 1A of the LOB

Good afternoon, Senator Looney, Representative Janowski and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Frank Sykes the Legislative Analyst with the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. This Commission represents a voice for the African-American community and accomplishes its mission primarily through research, policy analysis, advocacy and outreach. This Commission is honored to be testifying in support of Dr. Jewel Mullen's appointment as Commissioner of the Department of Public Health.

The Commissioner's appointment comes at a time when Connecticut faces serious budgetary challenges. Simultaneously we must help ensure that Connecticut's citizens have access to affordable, quality and sustainable health care. The health crisis within the African-American community is well documented. Based on data from the Connecticut Department of Public Health African-Americans as a group experience the highest rates of cancer, diabetes,

hypertension, low birth rate, high rate of asthma and obesity. This list of health disparities is by no means exhaustive. The problem of access to health care is even more complicated now in the face of higher employment rates, particularly within minority communities. In 2010 the unemployment rates for African-Americans were almost twice the state average, 17.2 percent versus 9.2 percent.[1] This means that without proper intervention, the health conditions of Connecticut's citizens, most certainly minority groups, are likely to worsen in years to come.

In view of these facts Dr. Mullen's appointment inspires optimism for many reasons. Firstly her qualifications are outstanding. She served in a dual role as the Director of Community Health and Prevention at the Massachusetts (DPH) and as the Chronic Disease Director. In addition in that same role she was responsible for monitoring initiatives under the Department of Division of Violence and Injury Prevention. Dr. Mullen holds Doctor of Medicine, Masters in Public Health and Masters in Public Administration degrees from Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Yale University and Harvard University respectively. Most importantly her work in health care delivery in Springfield, Massachusetts, within an urban setting cannot be understated. This experience will be critical in understanding and addressing the many health disparities Connecticut residents' faces, based on race, income and class. More importantly throughout her distinguished professional career, Dr. Mullen has demonstrated that she is an effective, skilled and competent leader. She is confident of her ability to lead the Department of Public Health during these very tough and complex times. We are encouraged that under her direction she will make the right policy decisions to steer Connecticut on a path to achieve healthier outcomes for all its residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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[1] **Bureau of Labor Statistics** - Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and detailed age, 2010 annual averages p — continued, http://www.bls.gov/lau/ptable14full2010.pdf